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# ST 501 Method and Praxis in Theology

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<b>Method and Praxis in Theology</b>
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Asbury Theological Seminary

ST501

Fall 2002, T, 2:30-5:15pm

Dr. Zaida Maldonado Pérez

**Office Hours:**

T 5:15-6:00, TH 5:15-6:00 or by appointment

(O) 407-482-7647

(You can also reach me by phone, preferably during office hours or by email.)

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**COURSE OVERVIEW:**

“Why am I doing what I am doing the way I am doing it (and not another way)?”

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Anselm of Canterbury expressed the desire to deepen his knowledge and therefore also his relationship to God as “faith seeking understanding.” Others have stated it by asking “what would Jesus do?” or, “how can I be faithful in this time and place?” All of these questions have a key common denominator--a conscious effort to understand in order to better our service and our relationship to God, to our communities, to the world. This conscious effort demands that we explore the variety of methods that have often led to very different responses to the same question. These responses, articulated in the corpus of Christian doctrine, reflect the differing theologies that not only vie for our attention but point to the role of reflection, understanding and judgment in the task of theology. In this sense, the title of our course may be somewhat misleading as it suggests that there might be one method or praxis in theology. Our various readings covering a variety of topics and methods in the Christian faith will prove that this is not the case. Though questions may remain the same, our differing contexts and historical situations may call for a reexamination of previous responses and often, a reformulation of the very questions themselves.

In short, the task of theology is not a finished process. It is our calling as leaders and ministers to attend to this process with the utmost diligence and prayer.

As stated in the catalog, this is an introductory course that will help prepare you for all course offerings in theology.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

(These objectives are taken from the core course description and are normative for the Wilmore and Orlando campuses)

Upon completion of this course, the student will have an introductory knowledge of critical theological method, enabling them to:

1. Describe how classical Greek/Roman philosophy influenced the manner in which the Early Christian Apologists and the Early Church Fathers did theology;

2. Articulate the impact of the Enlightenment upon modern theology, particularly the influence of Kant's philosophy and its contribution to such movements as liberalism, existentialism, and neo-orthodoxy.
3. Describe the rise of the modern historical consciousness, particularly the relation between critical history and Christian faith;
4. Understand the significance of the transition from premodern to modern and postmodern thought, with special reference to the shift from ontology (premodern) to epistemology (modern) to hermeneutics (postmodern);
5. Identify the key points in the transition from modern to postmodern paradigms, especially hermeneutical phenomenology, postliberalism, and deconstructionism;
6. Articulate the influence of postmodern science upon theological method;
7. Appreciate Wesley's methodical use of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience;
8. Apply critical theological method to the effective practice of Christian ministry in the postmodern age.

### SECTION ONE: Early church to pre-modern

**The Discipline of Theology: What is theology? What is method in theology? What is praxis? How and why are these important?**

#### **Class 1/Sept. 3**

- **Reason, Scripture, Experience, Tradition and the Compartmentalization of Theology**
- **What is theology? The functions of theology**
- **What is method? What is praxis?**
- **“Dismantling my Theological Edifice”**

#### **Class 2/Sept. 10**

- **Explorations in theology. The role and functions of Theology continued.**

➤ **Assignment:**

**1. Readings**

Origen, *On First Principles*

*The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*

**2. For discussion**

After reading the above, be prepared to discuss the following questions:

- *What is theological about this narrative/piece?*
- *How do you understand its function(s) within theology?*
- *What methods are evident?*
- *How does it inform your praxis?*
- *What questions does it raise?*

### 3. Written

Two questions per reading to be turned in before class.

## SECTION TWO

### Impact of Scholasticism, Philosophy, Enlightenment and Modernity upon Method in Theology

How do you do theology? The methods and materials
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#### Class 3/ Sept.

##### Christianity, “the true philosophy?”: The role of reason/philosophy in theology

➤ **Assignment:**

##### 1. Readings

Tertullian, “The Prescription Against Heretics,” chs. VII-XV in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (ANF), Vol. 3

Justin Martyr, Chs. I-VII (Greek apologist of 2<sup>nd</sup> c.) in ANF, Vol. 1

Anselm of Canterbury, “Proslogion” ch. I in *Anselm of Canterbury*

Wesley: Sermon 70: “The case of Reason Impartially Considered

Roberto Goizueta, “In Defense of Reason,” pp. 15-26 in *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* (JHLT) Vol. 3:3 (1996)

##### 2. For discussion

- *What are the theological differences, similarities?*
- *How are their methods different, similar?*
- *How does their method impact their outcome?*
- *How do these inform, critique your theology and praxis?*

#### Class 4/ Sept. 24

##### The role of reason continued

##### The role of experience:

- *Dime con quien andas y te diré quien eres\**: The Role of context in method in theology (or in “doing” theology)
- The role and function of “dichos” (proverbs) or “sayings” in contemporary language
- Other contexts and our own considered
- Discussion of readings

➤ **Assignment:**

##### 1. Read

Choose readings from a *or* b *and* read c.

- a. *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* by Nancy Eisland, chs. 2, 5, 6, Pp. 31-48, 89-119.

- b. Clement of Alexandria's "The Rich Man's Salvation" 11-17, in *Documents in Early Christian Thought*, pp. 203-206  
*The Cost of Discipleship* by D. Bonhoeffer, pp. 11-35, 45-60
- c. Schleiermacher: his First Speech from "Speeches on Religion to the Cultured Among its Despisers," pp. 67-76  
Emmanuel Kant, *What is the Enlightenment*.

## 2. For discussion

- What are the similarities/differences in the paired readings? (especially "b")
- How do you understand the role of reason and experience in theology?
- What questions would you bring to the texts?
- How do these readings impact my praxis?

## 3. Written

A one page paper describing your social, political, economic, gendered, cultural, racial/ethnic, educational, context/background.

Write 5 questions that arise from reflecting on that background and your own call to ministry or praxis.

\*("Tell me with whom you walk and I'll tell you who you are")

## How do you read a text? What makes it authoritative?

### Class 5/ Oct. 1

#### The relationship between experience and hermeneutics

*Hermeneutics* and the search for meaning

- Hermeneutics of Suspicion,
- Hermeneutics of generosity
- Insider/Outsider perspectives
- Communication theory

#### ➤ Assignment:

##### 1. Readings

"The Significance of a Minority Perspective," in *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective*, pp.21-30.

"Reading from Context to Context: Contributions of a Feminist Hermeneutic to Theologies of Liberation" by Sharon Ringe, in *Lift Every Voice (LEV)*, pp. 282-290.

"Cone: The Social Context of Theology," in *Readings in Christian Theology (RCT)*, pp. 384-388

"Gutierrez: Orthopraxis, Not Orthodoxy," in *RCT* pp. 388-393

"Ruether: The Prophetic Iconoclastic Christ," in *RCT*, pp.393-397

"Symbol, Myth, and Ritual: The Method of the Minjung," by Young-Chan Ro in *LEV*, pp. 41-48

##### 2. For discussion

- *What are the different hermeneutical tools being used?*
- *How does experience relate to perspective in the readings?*
- *What questions do you bring to the texts?*
- *How do these readings and perspectives inform your own praxis?*

## **Class 6/ Oct. 8**

### **The role of hermeneutics continued**

#### ➤ **Assignment:**

##### **1. Readings**

All of the readings below are in *RCT*

Agustine: Free Will and Sin, pp. 176-180

Luther: Sin and Grace, pp. 180-185

Tennant: Difficulties In The Classic Doctrine, pp.185-189

Kierkegaard: Sin as Despair, pp. 189-192

Niebuhr: The Pride of Power, pp.192-196

Ricoeur: Paradox of the Servile Will, pp.196-199

Farrer: Beyond Augustinian Theodicy, pp. 199-204

##### **2. For discussion**

After reading the material assigned for this day be prepared to *discuss* the following questions:

- *“What is the basic problem with the human condition?”*
- *What are the different interpretations of “sin”? How do we define “sin?”*
- *What is the proposed solution to that problem?*
- *What are the components in the readings below that lead to different interpretations?*
- *How are these components important for your own context and praxis?*

##### **3. Written:**

b. Write a one to two-page response to the following questions:

- *What are the components in the readings that lead to different interpretations?*
- *How are these components important for your own context and praxis?*

Note: you may take the readings one by one and/or compare and contrast them in relation to the above question.

## **Class 7/ Oct. 15**

### **The role of scripture and tradition**

- The development of the canon
- A liberationist reading of scripture (exercise)

➤ **Assignment:**

*The Epistle of Barnabas*, pp. 50-61 (This is an ancient document, prob. c. 135 C.E., sometimes included in the canonical writings)

"Why the Gospels Were Written," and "The Canon: Christian Writings Become 'Scripture'," in *The Formation of the Christian Scriptures* by M. Baxter, pp. 1-6, 93-104

"Scripture, Tradition, Experience, and Imagination: A Redefinition" by Justo L. Gonzalez, pp. 61-77 in *The Ties that Bind*

"The Bible and Mujerista Theology" by Ada Maria Isazi-Diaz, pp. 261-269, in *LEV*

"Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World," by Kwok Pui-Lan, in *LEV*, pp. 271-282

"Mohler: Tradition as the Living Word," pp. 37-41 in *RCT*

**Class 8 / Oct.22**

**M I D T E R M**

(Take home)

**SECTION THREE**

**Post-modernity**

<b>Contemporary Theological Paradigms and Method in theology</b>
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**Class 9/ Oct. 29**

**Postmodernity and Christianity**

➤ **Assignment:**

"A Post-Christian and Postmodern Christianity," *Liberation Theologies*, pp. 83-94

"Postmodernity, Black Theology and Liberation in the U.S. A.: Michel Foucault and James H. Cone," in *Postmodernity and the Americas*

"Metamodern Aliens in Postmodern Jerusalem," by J. L. González in *Hispanic/Latino Theology*, pp. 340-350.

**Class 10/ Nov. 5**

**Postmodernity continued**

**Class 11/ Nov. 12**

**Class presentations**

**R E A D I N G   W E E K**

November 25-29

**Class 12/ Nov. 19**

**Class presentations**

**Class 13/ Dec. 3**

**Class presentations**

**Class 14/ Dec. 10**

**Class presentations**

**FINAL CLASS**

**NOTE:**

1. All assignments are due on the date of the class in which they are placed. For example, the assignments for Sept. 17 are due Sept. 17 and, so forth.
2. All the readings are on reserve at the library. The bibliography for this course, should you be interested in purchasing any of these books, is included below. (Note, by bibliography I am referring to the books that contain our assigned readings. Otherwise, please ask the librarian for the copies of the readings that have been placed on reserve.)

**READINGS:**

**NOTE: All assigned readings are on reserve in the library.**

**The following abbreviations are used throughout the syllabus.**

**ANF** *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Tanslatinos of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A. D. 325.*

Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 10 vols. New York: Christian Literature Co., 1886-97. Reprint: Eerdmans.

**LEV** *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside.* Edited by Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel. San Francisco: Harper, 1990.

**RCT** *Readings in Christian Theology.* By Perer C. Hodgson and Robert H. King. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985.

**Sources:**

Baxter, Margaret. *The Formation of the Christian Scriptures.* Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988.

Bingemer, Maria Clara. "A Post-Christian and Post modern Christianity." In *Postmodernity and the Americas.* Edited by David Bastone, Eduardo Mendiete, Lois Ann Lorentsen, et al. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship.* New York: Macmillan Press, 1967.

Bultman, Rudolf. "The Problem of Hermeneutics." In *Rudolf Bultmann: Interpreting Faith For the Modern Era.* Edited by Roger A. Johnson. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.

Clement of Alexandria. "The Rich Man's Salvation." In *Documents in Early Christian Thought.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Eisland, L. Nancy. *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994.

Goizueta, Roberto. "In Defense of Reason." In *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology.* Vol. 3.3 (1996) 16-26.

González, Justo L. *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Scripture, Tradition, Experience, and Imagination: A Redefinition." In *The Ties that Bind: African American and Hispanic American/Latino/a Theologies in Dialogue.* Edited by Anthony B. Pinn and Benjamin Valentin, New York: Continuum, 2001.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Metamodern Aliens in Postmodern Jerusalem." In *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise.* Edited by Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz and Fernando F. Segovia, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996.

González, Justo L. and Zaida Maldonado Perez. *Introduction to Christian Theology.*



- Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2002.
- Hodgson, Peter C. and Robert H. King. *Readings in Christian Theology*. Philadelphia: Fortress P, 1985.
- Hopkins, Dwight. N. "Postmodernity, Black Theology and Liberation and the U.S. A.: Michel Foucault and James H. Cone." In *Postmodernity and the Americas*. Edited by David Bastone, Eduardo Mendieta, Lois Ann Lorentsen, et al. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals and, What is the Enlightenment*. New York: Macmillan, 1990.
- Musurillo, Herbert Anthony, Translator. "The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas." In *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1972.
- Origen. *On First Principles*. Translated by G. W. Butterworth. New York: Harper & Row. 1966. See also *ANF*.
- Pelagius. "Letter to Demetrias; On Human Freedom; Original Sin." In *Documents of the Christian Church*. Edited by Henry Bettenson. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1967.
- Pui-Lan, Kwok. "Discovery the Bible in the Non-Biblical World." In *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*. Edited by Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel. San Francisco: Harper, 1990.
- Ringe, Sharon. "Reading from Context to Context: Contributions of a Feminist Hermeneutic to Theologies of Liberation." In *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*. Edited by Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel. San Francisco: Harper, 1990.
- Schleiermacher, Friedrich. "First Speech" (from "Speeches on Religion to the Cultured among its Despisers"). In *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Pionner of Modern Theology*. Edited by Keith W. Elements, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.
- Young-Chan, Ro. "Symbol, Myth, and Ritual: The Method of the Minjung." In *Lift Every Voice: Contstructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*. Edited by Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel. San Francisco: Harper, 1990.

**Method and Praxis ST501 LIST OF STUDENTS WITH DATE OF PRESENTATION:**

**NOVEMBER 12**

**BOOK TITLE**

- |                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| 1. Morris, Frank          | Buttrick, <i>Prayer</i>   |
| 2. Wright, Gabe           | Pannenberg, <i>What is Man?: Contemporary Anthropology in Theological Perspective</i> |
| 3. Smith, Jeff            | <i>The Concept of Dread</i>   |
| 4. Wells-Courrier, Arlene | <i>Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach</i>                       |
| 5. Hopkins, Mark          |   |
| 6. Lindsey, Coy           | Boff, <i>Liberation Theology</i>  |
| 7. Thompson, Nick         | Lampe, <i>The Seal of the Spirit</i>  |
| 8. Moseley, Debra-Suzanne |   |
| 9. Bera, Laura            | González, <i>Mañana</i>   |

**NOVEMBER 19**

- |                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| 1. Lohse, Adam       | Neibuhr, <i>Meaning of Revelation</i>    |
| 2. Henry, Sue        | <i>The Theology of the Sacraments</i>    |
| 3. Hartsfield, Allen | Bonhoeffer, <i>Life Together</i>         |
| 4. Hunt, Kristin     | Deciding between two                     |
| 5. Hurley, Brian     | Kaufman, <i>God the Problem</i>          |
| 6. Foote, Kerry      | <i>Original Sin</i> , Vol. 3             |
| 7. Schultz, Devin    |  |
| 8. Kadwell, Stephen  | Freire, <i>Pedagogy of the Oppressed</i> |

**DECEMBER 3**

- |                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| 1. MacLaren, Pat       | Neibuhr, <i>Christ and Culture</i>   |
| 2. Pike, Gordon        | Buber, <i>Good and Evil</i>  |
| 3. Heffelfinger, Katie | Rahner, <i>Inspiration in the Bible</i>  |
| 4. Binkley, Jessica    | Brueggemann, (The Bible and Postmodern Imagination)                                  |
| 5. Isaacson, James     | <i>The Doctrine of Original Sin According to Scripture, Reason and Experience</i>    |
| 6. Blair, Susan        | Brunner, <i>The Mediator: A Study of the Central Doctrine of the Christian Faith</i> |
| 7. Oplinger, Robert    | Niebuhr, <i>The Nature and Destiny of Man</i>  |
| 8. Alexander, Jeremy   |  |

**DECEMBER 10**

- |                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 1. Kunderling, Hazel        | Augustine, <i>City of God</i>           |
| 2. Alexander, Joyce         | McFague, <i>Models of God</i>           |
| 3. Obermayer Smith, Deborah | <i>Jesus: God and Man</i>               |
| 4. Garrison, Brian          |   |
| 5. Davidson, Ken            |   |
| 6. Didriksen, Jay           | Lewis, <i>Mere Christianity</i>         |
| 7. Masters, Triss           | Nolan, <i>Jesus Before Christianity</i> |

